Australian media promotes right-wing, anti-Chinese protest

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A chauvinist protest by a small right-wing grouping at the Chinese consulate in Sydney on Saturday, at which Chinese investment in Australia was denounced as an "invasion," was given what can only be described as remarkable attention by the mass media.

Last Friday, the *Sydney Morning Herald* prominently covered the fact that the Party for Freedom had distributed a flyer in the Sydney suburb of Lane Cove that asserted Chinese investors were responsible for the city's soaring property prices and called for people to join its protest. The newspaper interviewed Party for Freedom head, Nick Folkes, and extensively quoted his diatribes against China and "foreign ownership."

At the actual protest on Saturday were camera crews, photographers and journalists from the state-owned Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Corporation (SBS), the major commercial television stations, Hong Kong and Chinese mainland television stations, 2GB radio and the Murdoch and Fairfax print media.

Dozens of police established road blocks at both ends of the street where the Chinese consulate is located and prevented anyone, including a small group of self-proclaimed "anti-racists" and the media pack, from entering the area. Shielded by the police cordon, Nick Folkes and about a dozen right-wing demonstrators assembled outside the consulate, holding Australian flags and anti-Chinese placards.

With the media prevented by police from getting close enough to film or photograph the protest, Folkes came to them. Deploying his small group with their signs and banners in front of the cameras and photographers—who outnumbered them close to three to one—he was interviewed for nearly 20 minutes about his right-wing chauvinist views, with SBS and the ABC asking the bulk of the questions.

After running brief stories on the evening television news, the media, perhaps in response to the very small numbers at the protest, has not taken it any further—at this stage. However, its interest in demagogic denunciations of a "Chinese invasion" is highly revealing.

The context in which the Party for Freedom organised its protest is one in which virtually the entire political establishment is giving full support to US plans to militarily confront China over its territorial claims in the South China Sea. If war breaks out, Australia will fight alongside the US against China and Australian territory will be used as the staging base for American operations.

The mass media has collaborated with successive governments to ensure that the build-up toward military conflict over recent years has largely taken place behind the backs of the population. Millions of workers and youth do not realise just how advanced the war preparations are and how dangerous the situation is. As they become aware, there will be a groundswell of anti-war sentiment.

Under such conditions, the Australian establishment instinctively recognises the propaganda value of the Party for Freedom and its demonisation of China as a threat to the Australian "way of life" and as an "invader." The media, led by state-owned outlets such as the ABC and SBS, is more than capable of giving blanket promotion to such views in order to try and create a social base for militarism and war and to intimidate and silence opposition.

The views of Nick Folkes toward China are not a great deal different from those held by media commentators. The international editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Peter Hartcher, has denounced China as a "fascist state." Greg Sheridan, the foreign editor of

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the *Australian*, regularly condemns Chinese "aggression." Both have openly advocated Australia participating alongside the US in a conflict with China over the South China Sea.

Denunciations of a "Chinese invasion" have already become a feature of politics in New Zealand. The Labour Party and the Greens have joined with the right-wing New Zealand First Party to condemn Chinese asset purchases and to demand that Chinese citizens be banned from buying residential property. The xenophobia has been steadily whipped up by the political establishment alongside the country's ever closer alignment with the US "pivot to Asia."

As well as dovetailing with war preparations, the scapegoating of Chinese investors also serves to divert growing anger in the working class from the real causes for the rise in residential housing prices—the relentless speculative operations of the major banks and property developers.

The major political parties in Australia have already begun to stir up anti-Chinese chauvinism. In the recent New South Wales state election, the Australian Labor Party and the trade unions denounced the conservative government for planning to sell electricity assets to Chinese buyers. In March, the federal government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott compelled a wealthy Chinese investor to sell a $40 million property which he had purchased illegally. In its budget in May, the Abbott government hiked the application fees for non-citizens seeking to buy residential property to $5,000 and introduced a series of harsher penalties and fines for illegal purchases.

The media promotion of Saturday's xenophobic protest is a warning that the vilification of China and Chinese people is set to escalate.

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